614 consultation likewise underwent changes. In the beginning there
*173 was no great amount of dissension within the furu-ba, but gradu-
578 ally, as the importance of the clan grew and the wealth of influ-
ential members increased, divergent opinions arose, held by strong and determined partisans. Then the dyon'-kuntigi were opposed among themselves, and the recurrent periods of anarchy bear witness to the consequences of these internal quarrels.

Organization of the Clan

614 The army. The office of fama is dominated by the need
721 to ensure the prosperity of the clan since, in theory, the clan's only reason for existence is that of procuring for its members as many material satisfactions as possible.

The usual way to make a fortune among these people was through armed pillage. When a fama was elected, the bow and quiver symbolized the clan's activity, and according to the reasoning of Kanou-ba-nyouma, it was essential that the arrows should hit someone. Thus, it was necessary to go to war. That was the way to acquire slaves, by means of which the great -- and everyone aspired to be such -- satisfied their desires. That is why the essential organization in the clan was the armed force. [311]

614 This organization was based on the distribution of the
●701 slaves among chiefdoms (dyon'-kuntigi-ya). Observed as a whole, the army was composed of a certain number of sections called sen' (literally, "foot"). This was not a specific unit, but merely the name used to designate an organized group under the leadership of a chief. Each sen' had a variable number of men. The bolo (literally, "arm") was a "band" made up of a likewise variable number of sen' and commanded by an important chief.

614 When the army was drawn up for battle, it faced the
726 enemy with a central mass called disi (literally, "chest") made up of the corps of sofa, flanked on the right and the left by bolo called, respectively, kini-n-bolo (right arm) and numa-n-bolo (left arm) (1). Each of these bolo were made up of furu-ba dyon'

1. Note this anthropomorphism applied to the army, which thus included head, arm, feet, chest.

614 726 surrounded by ton'-dyon'. Behind the disi there was a special reserve composed only of ton'-dyon'; this was the ton'-koro-bolo.

614 701 The fama himself designated the leader (keli-tigi) of all the expeditions of war. This might be one of the dyon'-kuntigi or some member of the community of the fama; sometimes the fama himself might take command.

The personal protection of the fama was the duty of the corps of sofa. In principle, considering the etymology of the name, the sofa were supposed to take care of the horses; this does not mean that they were necessarily horsemen or even grooms. The youngest served as pages and sometimes as grooms; the older ones were confidential aides to whom the fama entrusted missions. The sofa constituted one part -- and by no means the least important -- of what might be called the household of the fama: an assemblage of persons employed for various duties under the immediate authority of the fama.

727 They were recruited from young prisoners taken in raids and other operations of war.

When the fama led an expedition which was engaged for some time or when he took part in some important affair, he liked to arrange and to preside over the soli of the boys of the conquered people and to have one or more of his many children take part. [312] This was a means of assuring himself of the devotion, generally regarded as unfailing, of these soli-ma whose "birth" into man's estate he had honored and who, by virtue of the ceremony itself, were thus linked to some of his own children. Mostly these young men would then swell the ranks of the sofa.

This army, which might be said to be a regular army, theoretically received everything it needed from the fama: mounts, equipment, weapons, ammunition, etc. This justified the very considerable share of booty kept by the fama himself; he was thus repaid for what he had furnished, was provided with resources needed to replace what had been destroyed, and finally, was able to add to the store of equipment needed to make war. There was also the special need to increase the clan's treasury with a view to all possible eventualities.

The army was augmented by allied or volunteer contingents. The allies had a solemn agreement with the clan, based on a

614 religious and reciprocal oath. Their contribution entitled them
•701 to a share of the booty. Volunteers, who enlisted for an engagement or a whole campaign, came in under conditions settled in advance.

The fama furnished the allies, just as he did the volunteers, with whatever they needed and deducted the amount from their share of the loot. Sometimes a third party, not involved in the expedition, provided mounts, equipment, and weapons for the enterprise in exchange for a prearranged reward.

In short, armed pillage was a business directed by the fama, who could admit interested participants if he so desired. If the operation were successful, the clan gained predominance over
[727] the conquered regions, which the fama then exploited as he saw fit. The booty was the first result of the enterprise, and it served both to pay the expenses incurred in the affair and to swell the treasury of the clan.

This explains why the clan's army, for a consideration, hired itself out to anyone who asked for support, as an ally, as a mercenary force, or in any other capacity. The army might simply intervene in a quarrel of its own accord when there seemed to be profit to be gained (1). [313]

1. See below how the fama of Ségou lent his support to a marabout of Sous. The Bambara also intervened on numerous occasions in the internal quarrels of Khasso, Boundou, Fouta, etc. Their role as mercenaries is clearly shown in the Tarikh es Soudan.

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701 The ton'-dyon' were distinguished by a special hair ar-
567 rangement. Their heads were completely shaved except for three
[302] tufts of hair which formed two braids on the crown of the head and one at the nape of the neck.

The slaves of the household of the fama could be recognized by their well-known tattoo (1) which consisted of three

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1. In general, it is risky to depend

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incautiously on tattooing as a distinguishing mark of race or even of rank; the tattoo described here has not only been used by people of various origins, but has even been appropriated by all kinds of people as a form of snobbishness.

parallel cuts from temple to lower jaw on either side of the face. Furthermore, these people borrowed the dyamu of the fama (Kouloubali, Dyara, etc.), just as certain servants in some of the French provinces are called by their master's name because they are members of the household bearing that name.

614 701 411 The elite troops (sofa, ton'-dyon', etc.) were armed with axes (sukala) (2). Important chiefs also had axes, the insignia of

2. An instrument's name derived from suka, a variant of sua, meaning "to pierce." The men armed with axes were, in fact, assigned the special task of "making a breach" in the wall inclosing the settlement under attack.

command, sometimes made of precious metal, such as copper or silver. The axe carried by the fama was made of gold and enchased (3).

3. The chronicle relates that Tonmassa, after murdering Dékoro, carried off the golden axe, the symbol of supreme command.

The spear (tama) was often regarded as a weapon of distinction also. The ordinary warriors were armed with bows (kala) and arrows (bimye), the latter usually poisoned.

[177] Guns (marfa) gradually came into use, imported by native traders (Dyula). The chronicle claims that the first firearms were introduced among "the people of Ségou" in Mamari's time by an army from Kong and that these guns were of the blunderbuss type.

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Chiefs and other notables carried a short sabre (m-pan) slung from their shoulders. These were probably Turkish in origin and were largely ceremonial weapons.

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The troops wore no specific uniform. Only a few of the more important personages were recognizable by certain insignia, and it sometimes happened that certain individuals were honored by distinguishing marks. The chronicle tells us that Mamari [314] had Ngolo Dyara outfitted in red, a uniform particularly desired. Likewise, he gave Tonmassa a pair of trousers that were unusually wide and consequently attracted everyone's attention.

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Drummers (dunu) and trumpeters (buru) made up a military clique which also included men who played xylophones (bala) and various accessory instruments, especially bells (tana, veleni, etc.), and gourds half-filled with pebbles or grain.

The drum beaten to sound a rally, which was, therefore, in a manner of speaking, the announcer of war, was the tabala. The cylinder, bowl-shaped and usually made of wood or sometimes pottery, was covered with an ox-hide, often untanned, which was stretched by thongs tied under the drum. In theory, [766] this drumhead was always changed at the death of a fama, when the skin was broken as a sign of mourning (1), and was replaced

1. It should be noted that the destruction of the drumhead is comparable with the killing of the dead chief's dog and the presentation of a dead chicken to his relatives. All these are obviously "intentional breaks."

by the hide of the ox sacrificed in honor of the deceased. The tabala was carried horizontally between two men by means of leather grips and a third individual beat it by means of a ball attached to his wrist by a leather thong.

Other drums were of varying sizes and shapes. Some were carried under the arm (dunkan') or slung from the shoulder (tama); others, mounted on three feet (dange), presented a horizontal

534 beating surface. The most highly regarded was the denu-ba;
614 made of a hollowed cylindrical trunk with fairly thick walls,
701 the denu-ba is sometimes more than a meter high, with its lower third often slightly tapered with an adze. The drumhead is made of strong hide, reinforced in the center by a patch of leather sewed to it and stretched on pegs driven into the sides of the drum a few centimeters below the upper edge. When it is to be played, the drum is inclined on a fork that supports it. The drummer uses a kind of wooden hook, cleverly curved for elasticity and provided at one end [315] with a rounded part, often formed by a swelling contrived for the purpose or at other times made of a leather ball. The drummer's free hand provides the syncopation.

In certain cases, two denu-ba are used together; the drummer strikes them in such a way as to obtain a variety of sounds to form the basis for conventional harmony. Thus, the soldiers not only were trained to obey appropriate flourishes, but also were kept in touch with distant battalions by means of the
[202] drums. When it was skillfully played, the denu-ba made it possible to transmit information for considerable distances, because other drummers would retransmit it in turn. That is why it has
[718] been said that the denu-ba can talk and no doubt why it was so highly regarded by the ton'-dyon' that they considered it an oracle and honored the god who spoke through the drum by making the denu-ba the boli of this god. Hence, human victims came to
[782] be sacrificed to the drums of the ton'-dyon', especially under Ngolo, according to the chronicle.

[237] Trumpets (buru) were formerly made of ivory. The Tedzkiret speaks of the ivory trumpets used by a certain Bambara named Maro, and Mage relates that Ahmadou, Sultan of Ségou, gave the Bambara their ivory trumpets on the occasion of the Moslem festival.

[237] These ivory trumpets, however, have disappeared, no doubt carried off by traders. Trumpets made of horn, which were used concurrently with the ivory instruments, have been substituted for them. The horns of the large antelope are much in demand for this purpose. An opening is made a few centimeters from the pointed end, and the trumpeter makes the sound through this opening. The only result is a loud but monotonous noise.

534 The xylophone (bala) consists of a table made of strips
614 of hardwood, with a gourd under each strip, like a resonator;
701 the size of each gourd depends on the note desired. A section of the gourd is stopped by the vibrating surface which is a white material very closely woven like a cobweb. When it is played well, the bala produces various tunes, but they seem very thin compared to the noise of the drums and the shrieking of the trumpets. [316]

The accessory bells are of no particular interest.

538 No expedition of any consequence ever set out without a
701 griot (dyeli) (1). The griot has acquired a deplorable reputation

1. See above, pp. et seq., on the dyeli.

because of the fact that too often he uses his fluency to exploit the rich and powerful. This should not hide the fact, however, that the griot has often played a role not lacking in grandeur. In addition to being the official archivist of one or more families, he was also, in the native sense, a kind of epic bard who told his
[534] tales in song, accompanying himself on a stringed instrument similar to a guitar or a rudimentary harp. When told by him, the traditions, involved with those miracles so dear to the native, had something of the quality of our medieval epics. In that respect, at least, the griot truly deserved his title of dyeli (master).

Unfortunately, however, being reduced to earning his keep by making use of his information, he resorted to slander and calumny. This made him so much to be feared that in order to buy his silence the victims despoiled themselves for his benefit, as did those whom he intoxicated with base flattery.

538 In the army the griot stirred and encouraged the brave
701 men. On the eve of an important engagement or shortly before it,
726 a large assembly customarily was held, and roused by the epic poems of the griot no less than by the war dances and copious libations, the warriors promised under oath to perform such and such acts of great courage. It was then the duty of the griot to take public note, so to speak, of this commitment and later,

538 when the action had occurred, to celebrate the glory of its
701 author. If, however, events showed that there had been mere
726 bravado, the griot was then expected to stigmatize the braggart's cowardice -- something he never failed to do, since he found it just as profitable as to celebrate the glory of a hero.

At a critical hour when the army threatened to yield to the baser instincts engendered by rout, panic, and defeat, the griot often had the fortunate ability to arouse failing courage, sometimes [317] with cutting sarcasm, sometimes by exalting the lofty achievements of the ancestors, sometimes by setting forth in a tragic light the lot of the defeated. The chronicle shows him in this role when Ma-n-son, held in check by the stubborn resistance of Tyitya, sees himself -- final disgrace -- abandoned by his wives who have decided to return to Ségou. All through the night the griot sang battle songs, and at dawn the terrible assault proved that the army had recovered its spirit.

This handler of words was undoubtedly a formidable "master." He was said to know words that kill, since he was aware of the actions dominating every person's life. When Ma-n-son's twelve wives came in a body and told him that they had resolved to return without him to Ségou because they were all the more homesick when they felt that defeat was at hand, he ordered them to repeat their words before the griot whom he had summoned. With their action thus publicly noted, he gave them leave to depart, knowing that he would be able to avenge himself for their desertion whenever he decided to do so.

The songs of the griot, retold and repeated by the warriors and the people, gave memorable actions ineffaceable lineaments. The chronicle tells us that when the expedition against Dina was undertaken, the griot improvised the song which begins: "In the shade of the bushy kaminya tree, the hen cannot tell a grain of millet from a grain of sand." This meant that, in the confusion of battle, a warrior can make no distinctions. In fact, the country was completely laid waste during this expedition, and the booty was so abundant that forever after the griot had only to sing this song to arouse the warlike ardor of the ton'-dyon'.

538 A man of high rank is always accompanied by his griot,
814 who is both a confidant and a mere factotum. It is true, of course,

him, the submission of all the slaves.

567 The fa particularly displays his confidence in the wolo-so. He arranges his marriage, establishes him in life, admits him to his cult, and assigns him important tasks. Sometimes he marries his daughter and unites himself to him by fraternization and the oath. Children of the wolo-so are often circumcised with those of the master. Finally, the wolo-so bears his master's name and may in turn have slaves. At the third generation, the wolo-so becomes a free man. We still have very incomplete knowledge of this whole question of slavery, which incontestably exists throughout the whole Sudan; politically, it seems to have been a rational method of assimilating and fusing into a single people men of the most diverse origins.

567 f. The Army. -- Since the slaves were not pariahs, but, be-
701 cause of their number and the roles they filled, are important members of the society, it is normal that they also participated in the defense of the society. They have, therefore, their place in the army.

[72] Each Fama had an army, whose object was pillage, to procure the greatest possible amount of material goods for his subjects. The Fama despoiled those captives whom he enslaved, while others paid him tribute according to consecutive agreement. Ranged in battle, the army included the following components.

1. A central mass, disi (chest), made up of the corps of sofa (etymologically: those in charge of the care of the horses). The sofa formed the personal guard of the Fama; they were often recruited [61] from among young prisoners of war. The Fama often presided over the ceremony of circumcision of the children of the conquered whom he mixed in with his own children; they were thus bound and devoted to each other all their lives. The young sofa played the role of pages and grooms; the older ones became the trusted aides of the Fama, who charged them with important missions.

2. Two masses flanked the disi, to right and left: the kini-n-bolo (right arm) and the numa-n-bolo (left arm). These bolo were composed of furuba-dyon (age class of slaves corresponding to the flanton of the free men), and commanded by the ton-dyon (a sort of aristocracy of the slaves recruited from among the war prisoners).

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701 3. The ton-koro-bolo behind the disi is a special reserve formed entirely of pure ton-dyon.

4. The keli-tigi was the chief of the expedition, designated by the Fama. He might be a dyon-kuntigi (chief of the furuba-dyon), a member of the Fama's community, or the Fama himself.

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534 Finally, the army was accompanied by a musical corps, composed essentially of drums which transmitted messages. There were armpit drums (dunkan'), shoulder drums (taura), three-legged drums (dange), drums carried by two men (tabala), and coupled drums (denuba). Often horns (buru) were added, sometimes small horns made of ivory or horn, and sometimes xylophones (bada) and cowbells.

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537 A dyeli (griot) follows the expedition to observe the exploits that he must retransmit; he must encourage the warriors and dispel panic by the power of his oratory.

B. Influence of Social Organization on Economic Life

a. The ton, Work Community

621 We have seen that the social unit among the Bambara is the community. The community is also the work unit and the economic unit. The independent individual is not conceived of. The community owns all the wealth which makes up the spiritual and material patrimony: the land, the agricultural, industrial, and commercial products, the habitations ...

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[431] The community regulates the exploitation of the land. The dugu-tigi is the first occupant, master of the land, of which he distributes the lots to the different family heads. When a stranger, a family head, wants to enter into a community, he chooses an unoccupied field and asks the village chief for it. The request is accompanied by ten kola nuts and a chicken. Authorization cannot then be refused. The chief of the land sacrifices the chicken before the entire community and informs it of the installation of the newcomer. When the stranger wants to leave the land, he is given back his chicken and kola nuts.

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622 Land assigned to a family head may always be taken back from him without justification by the dugu-tigi and his council.